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SUBJECT: FINDINGS OF THE 2003 DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEY, WOMEN'S HEALTH AND SOCIAL STATUS: PART II OF III

REF: LAGOS 1247

1. Summary. The findings below on women's health and their social status are from the executive summary of the 2003 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey. The nutritional status of Nigerian women falls within the internationally accepted normal range. The total fertility rate is 5.7 children, high even by African standards, and use of modern family planning methods is low, only 8 percent for married women. Most births occur at home in Nigeria, but most mothers receive pre-natal care at least once during pregnancy. Although one-fifth of Nigerian women are circumcised, the practice is declining. Most working women decide alone what to do with their earnings; generally, however, women continue to be dominated by men in Nigeria, particularly regarding family decisions, and continue to be subject to beatings by husbands. End summary.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

2. Nutritional Status of Women. The mean body mass index (BMI) of Nigerian women at the time of the survey was 22.3, which falls well within the internationally accepted normal range (between 18.5 and 24.9). Almost two-thirds of the women (64 percent) in the sample population had BMIs falling in the normal range; 15 percent were thin, including 2 percent severely thin. The youngest women were the most likely to be thin. One-quarter of the women 15-19 years of age had a BMI of less than 18.5. One-fifth of the Nigerian women weighed more than they should have: 15 percent were overweight and 6 percent obese.

3. Maternal Care. Almost two-thirds of mothers in Nigeria (63 percent) had received antenatal care (ANC) for their most recent live birth in the five years preceding the survey. One-fifth of mothers (21 percent) had received ANC from doctors; almost four in ten of the women had received care from nurses or midwives (37 percent). Almost half the women (47 percent) had made the minimum number of four recommended visits, but most of the women who had received antenatal care had not gotten care within the first three months of pregnancy. Slightly more than half of the women who received antenatal care said they had been informed of potential pregnancy complications (55 percent). Fifty-eight percent of the women had received iron tablets; almost two-thirds had had urine or blood samples taken; and 81 percent had had their blood pressure measured. Almost half (47 percent) of the women had not received tetanus toxoid injections during their most recent birth.

4. Most births in Nigeria occur at home (66 percent). Only one-third of the live births during the five years preceding the survey occurred in a health facility. Slightly more than one-third of the births were attended by doctors, nurses, or midwives. A smaller proportion of women had received postnatal care. Only 23 percent of the women who gave birth outside a health facility had received postnatal care within two days of the birth of their last child. More than seven in ten women who delivered outside a health facility had received no postnatal care at all.

5. All the data on maternal care showed that rural women are disadvantaged compared to urban women, and there are marked regional differences among women. Women in the south, particularly the South East and the South West, received better care than women in the north, especially women in the North East and North West.

6. Female Circumcision. Almost one-fifth of Nigerian women are circumcised, but the practice is declining. The oldest women are more than twice as likely as the youngest women to have been circumcised (28 percent versus 13 percent). This practice is most widespread among the Yoruba (61 percent) and Igbo (45 percent), who traditionally reside in the South West and South East. Half of the circumcised respondents could not identify the type of procedure that had been performed.

Among the women who identified the procedure, the most common involved cutting and removal of flesh (44 percent of all circumcised women). Four percent of the women reported they had undergone infibulation.

17. Among the 53 percent of Nigerian women who had heard of female circumcision, two-thirds (66 percent) believed that it should be discontinued, while 21 percent wanted the practice to continue. Less than half of circumcised women wanted the practice continued (42 percent). Continuation finds greater support among southerners than northerners and among those who are circumcised than the uncircumcised. Among men who had heard of the practice, almost two-thirds were against continuation of female circumcision, while about one-fifth favored it.

18. Perceived Constraints to Use of Health Care. Almost half of the women in the survey cited at least one barrier to their accessing health care services. The most commonly cited problem was getting money for treatment (30 percent), followed by distance to a health facility, and having transport (24 percent each). One in ten women said getting permission to access such services was a problem.

WOMEN'S CHARACTERISTICS AND STATUS

19. While most Nigerian women have had some education, 42 percent have never attended school. This is almost twice the percentage of men who have never attended school (22 percent).

10. Slightly over half of the women respondents reported being employed (56 percent) during the time of the survey. Eighty-four percent of working women had earned cash only or cash in addition to in-kind earnings. Almost three-quarters of the women who had received cash earnings reported that they alone had decided how their earnings had been used. Another 16 percent said they had decided jointly with their husbands or someone else. Only 10 percent of the women reported that someone else had decided how their earnings would be used.

11. The 2003 NDHS recorded information on women's role in different types of decisions in the household. Almost half (46 percent) of the married women participating in the survey reported they did not have final say (either singly or jointly) in any decision. Among the married couples, the husbands dominated household decision-making.

12. The respondents were asked whether husbands can justifiably beat their wives for specific reasons. Most men and women (about six in ten) believed there are occasions when a man is justified beating his wife. About half the women respondents believed that husbands can rightly beat their wives if the latter leave the home without telling their husbands or if the wives neglect the children. These were also the most common justifications cited by men (50 percent and 47 percent, respectively).

KRAMER